

TOWN OF SOUTHTON
BOARD OF FIRE COMMISSIONERS

Chairperson Bunko called the meeting of the Board of Fire Commissioners, held at Headquarters on September 20, 2018, to order at 6:00 p.m. Commissioners Bunko, Baker, Kanute, Robertson and Moise were present. Chief Butler was also in attendance.

Roll Call

Pledge of Allegiance

Commissioner Moise suggested that the Board jump to item 13, New Business, after item 8.A, Secretary's Report, so Commissioner Robertson could participate in the votes before he has to leave.

MOTION: by Moise, seconded by Kanute, to approve the minutes of the June 19, 2018, regular meeting as circulated. Motion carried unanimously.

MOTION: by Moise, seconded by Robertson, to approve the special minutes of the June 27, 2018, regular meeting as circulated. Motion carried unanimously.

MOTION: by Moise, seconded by Robertson, to approve payment of bills for June 2018 for \$118,696.77. Motion carried unanimously.

MOTION: by Moise, seconded by Kanute, to approve payment of bills for July 2018 for \$21,144.90. Motion carried unanimously.

MOTION: by Moise, seconded by Robertson, to approve payment of bills for August 2018 for \$28,054.31. Motion carried unanimously.

Secretary's Report:

Memo from Chief Butler recommending requesting a special appropriation of \$5,004 to the Police and Fire Extra Duty account

Memo from Chief Butler recommending denying FF Tyler Lentini's one-year leave of absence request

Memo from Chief Butler recommending hiring Volunteer Workforce Solutions to do a GIS Tapestry Report to aid in volunteer firefighter recruitment for \$5,000

NEW BUSINESS:

MOTION: by Robertson, seconded by Baker, to approve the request for a special appropriation in the Police and Fire Extra Duty account for \$5,004. Motion carried unanimously.

Commissioner Moise suggested that the request be a transfer rather than an appropriation. After further discussion about the account being a reimbursable service account as detailed in Chief Butler's letter, it was agreed that the request should be an appropriation.

MOTION: by Kanute, seconded by Moise, to deny FF Lentini's one-year leave of absence. Motion carried unanimously.

Vice Chairperson Baker stated that the company captain was notified of Chief Butler's recommendation and that FF Lentini is eligible to reapply at any time.

MOTION: by Kanute, seconded by Moise, to approve hiring Volunteer Workforce Solutions to do a GIS Tapestry Report to aid in volunteer firefighter recruitment for \$5,000. Motion carried unanimously.

Commissioner Robertson reported that he had talked to Town Council Chairperson Palmeri about having two trucks at the Apple Harvest Festival, one with career members and another with volunteer members. Commissioner Robertson discussed that having a presence at the festival would be a positive image for the department and help with recruitment.

Commissioner Robertson left at 6:25 p.m.

CHIEF'S REPORT:

The following is the statement from Chief Butler:

I have been on the job for seven weeks and four days and have discovered that we have many areas within the Southington Fire Department that need to be addressed. I think we can all agree that the task before us will not be completed in just a couple months and I will need the support of the Fire Commissioners to be able to move the organization forward. When I started this position as Fire Chief, I knew little of the organization or the town and I have been pleasantly surprised at the quality of the career and volunteer firefighters that serve the Town of Southington. I feel honored to be the Fire Chief, and I look forward to my time here.

In this short period of time, I have identified some areas that the organization will need to address, some of those areas include:

- Developing a Master Plan -This plan will lay out the 1, 3, and 5-year goals
 - Without a plan, we can't move forward
 - The plan identifies what steps we need to accomplish next
- Looking at the possibility of having the department Accredited through the Center for Public Safety Excellence
- Increasing the ISO Rating to a two; this would mean a decrease in fire Insurance premiums for the Town

Establishing Expectations

Before we can hold people accountable, we need to make sure that they know what is expected of them. Over the next couple of months, I will be providing to each level of the organization what my expectations for each position will be. I will be starting with Battalion Chiefs, and they will be receiving their expectation letters within the next couple days. I plan on having the Captain's expectation letters ready in the next couple weeks, and this will include both the Volunteer and Career Captains.

Rebranding the Department

There have been two major studies conducted by fire departments to determine what the public feels that the fire department does. These studies indicated that the public really has no idea of what the mission of the fire service has become in today's world. The public believes that all the fire department does is respond to fires and most indicated that the number of fires has decreased, so they weren't really sure what firefighters did all day. We have an obligation to educate the public on the services that the fire department provides to the community and the value that we add to the quality of life for the citizens and visitors. The rebranding will be the beginning of educating the public as to what we do such as:

- What is our vision for the Southington Fire Department
- We need to tell the story of who we are and what we do
- Improve our visibility through the use of social media
- Having a Southington Fire Department Facebook page
- Instagram and other social media accounts
- Selling what we do to the public
- Become more actively involved with the community

We will be changing the name of our Fire Prevention Division to Community Risk Reduction Division. This change better reflects what this Division does for the community.

Volunteers

This is an area that has consumed a substantial portion of my attention since taking over as Fire Chief. Without a strong volunteer firefighting force, the town will be forced to increase the number of career firefighters and ultimately increases taxes on the citizens, and this is not the position we want to be in, especially with trying to rebrand the organization. The volunteer fire service is struggling in this country today, and we as the leaders of the organization need to find ways to increase the number of volunteers who would be available to respond to emergencies quickly and efficiently.

Recruitment and Retention

This is one of the most challenging tasks that we must address. There are many issues facing the organization today, but recruitment and retention has got to be one of the most important ones that we must address.

The Tapestry Report should help guide us in developing a strategy that will improve our volunteer recruitment efforts. This report will not only tell us the areas of the town where

we will be most successful in recruiting new members but will also provide suggestions as to what the best technique for recruiting these members will be.

Volunteer Response Times

We must identify ways to improve response times of our volunteer firefighting force. Today's fires burn at a faster and hotter rate than those of our predecessors. In the past having a 15 to 20 minute response time still meant that the occupants had a chance to survive the fire. In the modern fire we need to have crews on location in 6 to 9 minutes to be able to possibly save the lives of the occupants of the fire building.

The increased volume of calls that the Southington Fire Department responds to, is growing each year. This year we are on track to break 2200-2500 calls. National statistics show that when a department breaks 1000 calls per year, it has a negative impact on the volunteer service. The increased volume of calls makes it difficult for the volunteer firefighting force to be available 24 hours a day seven days a week. The only way that we will be able to meet the needs of the town, will be to increase significantly the number of members each company has on its roster.

Changing the All Call back to where it was a year ago is an effort to reduce the workload on each of the companies and to provide some relief to the volunteer members we currently have. The department will be adjusting the number of still alarm assignments to further reduce the demand on the volunteer service.

Fire Police

I will be evaluating the need to have Fire Police dispatched on all incidents. Under the current operations plan, the fire police respond on all call dispatches and any time their company is dispatched in district. I will be looking at the possibility of having the fire police on their own tone, and they will be toned for calls as needed. I am in the exploratory phase of developing this plan.

Below are some numbers that we need to look at and try to figure out what is happening on the local level for recruitment and retention from 2010-2018 the numbers that have left each company:

Company 1 – Currently 27 members- lost 46

Company 2 – Currently 32 members- lost 20

Company 3 – Currently 21 members- lost 16

Company 5 – Currently 7 members- lost 19

The cost of these losses equal around \$353,000.00, this includes training, equipping, and physicals.

The Question of Aging Out

Currently the research that is available shows that a large number of Line of Duty Deaths that has occurred is from members that are 60 yrs. old or older. The rate of death of those over 60 years of age is 3 times higher and 2/3 of those deaths were sudden cardiac death. Currently, I am waiting for an official response from the Workers Comp insurance carrier.

Training Requirements

I am looking into reorganizing the training program for the department. I have not finalized exactly what the program will be but, it won't be reducing any of the requirements. I am looking at some innovative ways to provide the necessary training. This may include providing online training options as well as increasing the use of department instructors both Volunteer and Career Firefighters. I am looking to move to annual performance evolutions to ensure that all members are capable to perform all necessary fire ground skills. We may be able to transition away from the height and weight standards by utilizing the annual performance standards. Additional areas being looked at:

- Leadership training for all officers
- Performance Evolutions
- AFG Grant

Master Fire Station Improvement Plan

In the seven weeks since my start, I have met with the Volunteer Officers twice and with the Career Chiefs twice. One of my goals is to get all the officers engaged in improving the organization and building a relationship of trust with all sides. This task can be difficult because any time one side or the other believes that you're doing something for one and not the other it builds walls. My ultimate goal is to have one fire department, and that's the Southington Fire Department.

MOTION: by Kanute, seconded by Moise, to approve the Chief's Report. Motion carried unanimously

TRAINING REPORT: None

CHIEF'S SELECTION COMMITTEE:

Chairperson Bunko reported that the Chief's Selection Committee has officially been disbanded and thank you letters to the committee members will be mailed tomorrow.

COMMISSIONS COMMENTS AND COMMUNICATIONS:

Chairperson Bunko reported the following:

- Chief Butler has been on the job since July 31, 2018
- A special meeting will be set up for next Thursday, September 27, 2018, to interview candidates for the battalion chief, captain, and entry level firefighter/EMT positions
- Chief Butler was introduced to the Town Council at their meeting on August 27, 2018
- The department participated in the 911 ceremony held in Plantsville
- A reception for Chief Butler was held on September 8, 2018; Commissioner Robertson and Commissioner Moise were thanked for organizing it

Commissioner Moise thanked the on duty shift for helping with the flag at the 911 ceremony.

Vice Chairperson Baker thanked Father Joe for hosting a first responders mass and breakfast and encouraged all to attend the annual event next year.

Vice Chairperson Baker thanked BC Heath for going above and beyond for the department during his tenure as interim chief and continues in his current role as battalion chief.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE PUBLIC:

Nelson DeAngelo asked why the bills in June were so much higher than July and August's bills. The Board explained that the June bills were from the end of the fiscal year.

Finance Board member Kevin Beaudoin discussed his agreement with the goals that Chief Butler discussed in the Chief's Report and wished him luck.

BC Paul discussed being honored to being promoted to assistant chief and looking forward to working with Chief Butler to move the department forward. BC Paul discussed his history with BC Heath and what an honor it is to work with him.

Commissioner Kanute told of what outstanding officers the department has, both career and volunteer. Commissioner Kanute discussed his personal interactions with the officers in his position as a dispatcher has given him firsthand knowledge of the high caliber of officers the department has.

BC Dube, president of the IAFF Local 2033, officially welcomed Chief Butler to the department. BC Dube congratulated Assistant Chief Paul and BC Heath for all the work they put in. BC Dube stated that everyone looks forward to moving the department forward and that the first seven weeks has been a good start.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS: None

OLD BUSINESS: None

MOTION: by Moise, seconded by Kanute, to adjourn to Executive Session, excluding the public and the press with the exception of Chief Butler, to discuss personnel and contractual matters at 6:50 p.m. Motion carried unanimously.

EXECUTIVE SESSION:

No action was taken.

Meeting was adjourned at 7:15 p.m.

David Kanute, Secretary
Board of Fire Commissioners